

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 MCT-01 DHA-05 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /063 W
-----050309 251153Z /47

P R 251040Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8005
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: SITUATION IN SRI LANKA - AUGUST 23-25

REF: COLOMBO 3075

1. DURING THE PERIOD AUGUST 23-24, THERE WERE NO REPORTS OF MAJOR INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE, BUT SOME OF SCATTERED MINOR INCIDENTS AROUND THE ISLAND. THE ESTIMATED DEATH TOLL THROUGH AUGUST 24 IS 70, APPROXIMATELY 50 OF WHICH WERE TAMILS. APPROXIMATELY 1500 PERSONS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED FOR LOOTING AND OTHER CRIMES AND INFRACTIONS.

2. THE GOVERNMENT HAS SEIZED UPON THE POLITICAL CONSPIRACY THEORY AND THE NUMBER OF SLFP SUPPORTERS UNDER ARREST HAS RISEN INCLUDING FORMER SLFP MINISTER OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS T.B. TENNAKON AND HIS SON, BUT THE NUMBER HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED. IN A CABINET COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AUGUST 24, THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOVERNMENT REFERRED TO SOME PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN IN POWER AND LOST AS ATTEMPTING TO OBSTRUCT THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO PROVIDE SPEEDY RELIEF TO THE PEOPLE. FURTHER, THE COMMUNIQUE ALLEGES THAT THERE WAS A POLITICAL CONSPIRACY BEHIND WHAT ON THE SURFACE APPEARED TO BE A COMMUNAL CONFLICT. LANGUAGE OF THE COMMUNIQUE, HOWEVER, IS QUALIFIED, INCLUDING SUCH WORDING AS "IT APPEARS" AND "IT IS BELIEVED", INDICATING THAT THERE

MAY BE LITTLE HARD EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT A CONSPIRACY CHARGE.
(COMMENT: WHILE UNDOUBTEDLY SOME SLFP STALWARTS HAVE TAKEN
ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION TO SETTLE POLITICAL GRUDGES AND
MAY HAVE BEEN AGITATING VIOLENCE AS A MEANS OF EMBARRASSING
THE GOVERNMENT, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE NOW OF THE VIOLENCE BEING
THE RESULT OF A CONSPIRACY, IT STILL APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN
SPONTANEOUS IN MOST INSTANCES.)

3. ON AUGUST 24, THE CURFEW STARTED AT 1800, REPORTEDLY TO
FACILITATE MOVEMENT OF TAMIL REFUGEES TO SHIPS FOR TRANSPORT
TO JAFFNA. APPROXIMATELY 1800 TAMILS WERE SENT TO JAFFNA BY
SHIP AND BY SPECIAL AIR CEYLON FLIGHTS. EVACUATIONS TO JAFFNA
WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE, BUT AT A REDUCED RATE IF THE SITUATION
REMAINS RELATIVELY QUIET. OF SOME CONCERN ARE REPORTS THAT
POLICE HAVE MOVED SOME TAMILS FROM THEIR HOMES TO REFUGEE
CAMPS AND OTHERS TO JAFFNA INVOLUNTARILY "FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY."

4. THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS THAT THE SITUATION IS IMPROVING AND
WE HAVE NO REASON TO DISPUTE THE CLAIM. PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS
BY EMBASSY PERSONNEL WHO HAVE TRAVELED IN COLOMBO AND ENVIRONS
INDICATE THAT AFFECTED AREAS ARE BEING HEAVILY PATROLLED,
THAT THE CURFEW IS BEING RIGIDLY ENFORCED, AND THAT ONLY MINOR
INCIDENTS ARE OCCURRING. CIVILIAN VOLUNTEERS ARE BEING
USED TO AUGMENT POLICE PATROLS AND TO PROVIDE PROTECTION TO
TAMIL HOMES AND SHOPS IN MANY AREAS. THERE WILL BE A CURFEW
AUGUST 25 FROM 2000 TO 0400, EXCEPT IN TRINCOMALEE WHERE
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IT IS FROM 1800 TO 0600.

5. MINOR INCIDENTS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME, BUT
ALL IN ALL, THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS GENERALLY TO HAVE RESTORED
ORDER AND MAY BEGIN TO EASE OFF ON THE CURFEWS BY THE END
OF THIS WEEK OR EARLY NEXT. INCREASED ANIMOSITY BETWEEN TAMILS
AND SINHALESE HAS BEEN GENERATED BY THE INCIDENTS OF THE PAST
TWO WEEKS, HOWEVER, AND THE SITUATION HERE WHILE OUTWARDLY
CALM WILL REMAIN VOLATILE FOR SOME TIME WITH A POTENTIAL
FOR ANOTHER FLARE UP OVER ANY MINOR INCIDENT.
WRIGGINS

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Message Attributes

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